

VZCZCXRO5361
PP RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0182 2930839
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 200839Z OCT 06
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0307
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 0579
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 0345

UNCLAS CHIANG MAI 000182

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: TRT TIES STILL BIND

REF: CHIANG MAI 159

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Northerners who derived benefits from the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party before the Sept. 19 coup that deposed party leader Thaksin Shinawatra are now worried about the loss of that patronage, ranging from government-run social programs to assistance for weddings and funerals from party leaders. Many would welcome a Thaksin comeback. End summary

¶2. (SBU) According to local Thai News columnist Boonyarit Tulaphanphong, villagers and others who joined TRT got membership cards, a polo or T-shirt with the party logo and an "honorarium" of at least Baht 100 on registering. They were also promised eligibility in the 30-baht health plan, village funds, and poverty registration scheme, which were often presented as TRT rather than government-run programs. Of perhaps more importance, members could expect help of various kinds from the party MP or leader in their constituency. For example, for funerals the responsible party MP typically supplied vehicles for the funeral procession, tents, drinking water and ice and a wreath, as well as a VIP to preside over the ceremony.

¶3. (SBU) Additional perks went to local leaders or party canvassers, whose family members received preference for jobs at local government units, where average month salary levels start at a desirable 4,000 baht (approximately 100 dollars). Party cadres could also count on free stalls in Sunday markets held on public property, rights that could be sold to other venders. For events such as Chiang Mai's highly popular Sunday Walking Street, initiated in 2004 by Thaksin's sister Yaowapha Wongsawat, these stalls can be lucrative.

¶4. (SBU) Party members fear that Thaksin's ouster will mean a lessening of this kind of assistance. According to Boonyarit, those living in outlying areas or "Baan Nawk" are more worried than those in urban low-income communities, where services continue to flow from the still-TRT-dominated municipal government.

¶5. (SBU) Material benefits aside, Boonyarit believes that many local people, including middle class teachers, businesspeople, and government officials, remain loyal to Thaksin and would be prepared to respond to instructions from the party and the leader. For some, regional pride is the binding factor: "It's good to have a northern native as the Prime Minister".

¶6. (SBU) Noting that it would take four or five years to "correct" this blind faith in the party, Boonyarit cited former 3rd army chief Gen Saprang Kalayamitra's Sept. 22 comments to northern media representatives (reftel) about organizing a movement to dissuade local people from their "dependency" on TRT and to promote loyalty to the nation with the monarchy at the center. Boonyarit interpreted Saprang's remarks as an effort to

create a political safety valve for the coup group in the event the pro-Thaksin side regains power in the future.

17. (SBU) Comment: Thaksin's many supporters in northern Thailand have been quieted, but hardly vaporized. A little probing often reveals the opinion that much of what the former Prime Minister and his party did was good. Although martial law and a desire to avoid conflict have dampened public discussion of the issue, many people would likely be responsive to a Thaksin return.

CAMP